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SUBJECT: ISRAELI NSC CHIEF: GOI "ALONE" IN CONFRONTING
HAMAS; WILL NEITHER HINDER NOR HELP PLC ELECTIONS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for Reasons 1.4 (b)
) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: National Security Council (NSC) Chairman Giora Eiland told Congressman Robert Wexler (D-FL) on November 14 that the GOI feels "alone" in opposing any Hamas participation in the January 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections. The GOI felt obliged to state publicly that it will neither help nor hinder the PLC elections. The GOI, for example, will not work with the PA on easing the movement of candidates and voters as it had during the January 2005 presidential election. Eiland, however, said no extraordinary measures will be imposed to prevent the movement of Hamas candidates not suspected of involvement in terrorist activity. Eiland said that PA President Mahmud Abbas's refusal to move against Hamas and other militant groups had actually set back the roadmap. He said he doubted that Abbas is fully committed to a two-state solution. Eiland said he has little hope of any progress toward a final settlement as long as the PA continues to tolerate the existence of Palestinian militant groups and terror networks. Eiland recommended that the international community take a tougher stance against militant groups and insist on the disarming of militant groups as a condition for further assistance to both the PA and the Lebanese government. He suggested that the GOI may demonstrate greater flexibility on some peace process issues as the Likud reacts to the recent Labor Party leadership change. End summary.

Hamas on the Rise

2. (C) Eiland began his meeting with Congressman Wexler by recounting the events leading up to PA President Abbas (Abu Mazen) securing an agreement with Hamas on a period of "calm" (tahdi'a) in the security sphere. In exchange for that calm, according to Eiland, Abbas agreed to fully integrate Hamas into the political process, including membership in the PLO. Eiland asserted that the GOI initially refrained from raising its objections to this arrangement directly with Abbas. Since that time, however, Hamas has increased its political activities and gained in stature among Palestinians. Eiland said that, in contrast to Western concepts of opposition groups, Hamas sees itself as equal to the PA and capable of independently determining what is in the Palestinians' national interest regardless of the PA's position.

3. (C) Eiland asserted that Hamas is part of a larger movement -- the Muslim Brothers -- and as such is committed to an agenda broader than Palestinian aspirations. Compromise is not in the spirit of this movement. The existence of Hamas itself, Eiland continued, is based on two principles: First, the rejection of the State of Israel and any political system allowing Jews to govern Muslims; and second, the only acceptable government for Palestinians is one based on Islamic rule. Eiland suggested that Hamas may see fit to compromise on minor issues in the short-term, but will not change its strategic goals. As a result, the GOI "can't live with a reality" where Hamas operates simultaneously as a legitimate political organization and as an armed movement.

No Help, No Hindrance

4. (C) Eiland advised that, given Hamas's ascendancy, its continued militancy and the PA's inability to disarm it, the GOI announced that it would neither help nor hinder the January 2006 PLC elections. He explained that the GOI will do nothing to undermine the elections and will not undertake any actions that could be construed as GOI meddling. By the same token, unlike in January 2005 when the GOI and PA worked together to facilitate movement of candidates and voters, this time the GOI will not be proactive in helping the process. The GOI will treat the election day as any other ordinary day. In response to Wexler's question on how the GOI would deal with Hamas candidates, Eiland said that Hamas candidates with no known ties to terrorist activity would be subject to the same regulations applied to other Palestinians.

5. (C) Eiland suggested that the GOI would be inclined to adopt a more helpful policy towards the elections provided

that the PA agreed in advance to certain conditions. For example, the PA could commit to implementing an election law under which parties seeking to participate would have to uphold the constitution. Also, a new political party law should require the disbanding of military wings and a commitment to a two-state solution. Eiland likened these requirements to what had been put in place for elections in Afghanistan. He said that international criteria as applied elsewhere could prompt the GOI to develop an alternative policy to the PLC elections.

Hollow Victory

16. (C) In response to Wexler's question about whether Abbas needed to secure a working majority in the PLC as a result of the upcoming elections, Eiland replied that Abbas will have the numbers but not a true majority. He explained that Fatah is not a unified party, but is fractured by disparate interests and alliances, including some governed by a generational divide. Abbas, therefore, has difficulties controlling his own party, let alone Hamas.

17. (C) Eiland said that, in the wake of PLC election gains, Hamas would likely demand much more practical participation in the PA. Eiland noted that all GOI agreements on Palestinian issues are with the PLO. If Hamas should join the ranks of the PLO, he questioned whether the PLO would remain a viable partner in final status negotiations.

GOI "Alone" Against Hamas

18. (C) Eiland asserted that there had been a marked silence from the international community on the issue of Hamas participation in the PLC elections. He added that recent USG statements indicated a change in the U.S. position on the subject. The GOI, according to Eiland, would have preferred a discussion between the international community and the Palestinians leading to an electoral process less favorable to militant groups like Hamas. Wexler replied that the USG clearly would prefer not to have Hamas involved in the elections. The GOI, however, may have made a strategic error in not having done more to encourage a broader based approach prior to announcing its own position. Wexler suggested, for example, that a coordinated Quartet position on Hamas participation would have carried greater weight.

19. (C) The general lack of interest in fully implementing UNSCR 1559 offered the GOI little encouragement regarding the formulation of an international policy on Hamas, according to Eiland. He asserted that the GOI was alone in caring about Hizballah, despite the resolution's requirement that militias in Lebanon be disarmed. As it was now up to the GOL to complete the task, Eiland continued, the international community, particularly the donor community, should make disarming the militias a prerequisite to any economic and military assistance. He suggested that a donor conference scheduled to be held in Beirut in December would offer an appropriate venue to establish conditionality in assistance to the GOL. Eiland said that, until now, "no other voice" has been raising this issue.

Peace Process Politics

110. (C) Eiland said that until a week ago the main political threat to PM Sharon was from more conservative elements within his own Likud party. As a consequence, the PM could not afford to make compromises. Now, Eiland continued, with the change in the Labor party leadership, the main political threat is from the left. As a consequence, a Likud-led government may be more open to compromise on some peace process issues.

111. (C) Eiland said that, "in a very ironic way," the differences between the GOI and Palestinians on a final settlement are not great, with about 90 percent of the details agreed. There is, however, "total dispute" over the remaining issues. Eiland asserted that PM Sharon fully supports a two-state solution and a revival of the roadmap process but will not repeat the mistakes of previous governments by engaging in political discussions with the Palestinian leadership "while under fire" from militant groups operating in areas under PA control. According to the GOI's interpretation of the Road Map, the security problem must be solved first. The Palestinians, however, continue to believe that immediate talks on a final settlement will significantly mitigate the security threat. Abbas insists on having a clear timetable towards reaching a final resolution. Eiland said he found it hard to see any formula that would bridge this "gap" in respective GOI and PA views of the roadmap.

¶12. (C) Wexler, referencing a recent meeting he had with former Irish Prime Minister John Bruton, mentioned that some observers believe that it is unrealistic to demand the disarming of Palestinian militants in the absence of political dialogue. It took decades of negotiations before the IRA finally laid down its arms. Eiland's deputy, Eran Etzion, replied that this argument used the wrong analogy because, in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was the PLO that filled the same role as the IRA, and had already negotiated with the GOI and agreed to abandon the armed struggle. The burden of responsibility for suppressing Palestinian violence, therefore, now rests with the PLO as it operates within the structure of the PA, according to Etzion.

Pessimistic on Peace Prospects

¶13. (C) Eiland said he doubted that the PA or even Abbas believes in a two-state solution. The establishment of a Palestinian state within the confines of the West Bank and Gaza is viewed as a near term result and not a long-term response to Palestinian aspirations. Until 1967, the Arab world and the Palestinians did not even mention the possibility of an Israeli state, according to Eiland. He said he was not confident that Palestinians had given up the vision of a Palestinian State stretching from the Mediterranean to the Iraqi-Jordanian border. Politicians may conclude agreements, but the average Palestinian holds to this dream.

¶14. (C) Wexler suggested that, in the face of international, PA and, eventually, Arab-state recognition of a two-state settlement, the Palestinian populace would, by necessity, have to accept a negotiated agreement. Eiland asserted that this was a "false premise," particularly given the current level of support for militant groups. Eiland, however, volunteered that he probably had a much more pessimistic view of Hamas and even some of the secular Palestinian movements than most Israelis. Nevertheless, he said he doubted that these groups would ever accept Israel and focus their energies on building their own state.

¶15. (U) Congressman Wexler did not clear this message prior to his departure.

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JONES